

# Cultivate Your Happiness: A ThriveRU Weekly Workbook

Facilitator's Resource Manual

Ryerson  
University



Student  
Affairs

*The Cultivate Your Happiness: ThriveRU Weekly Workbook* was designed to provide students with exercises that have proven to be effective in increasing life satisfaction, happiness, and resilience.

This accompanying Facilitator's Resource Manual for the ThriveRU Weekly Workbook is designed to provide a context to staff, faculty and students in leadership roles (in residence, mentoring, etc.) when they wish to discuss these topics with students. It also provides additional resources and potential ways in which to introduce the exercises in such a way as to deepen and enrich the experience for students. These research-validated exercises from Positive Psychology can assist you to anticipate the stressors faced by our students at specific points during the semester and suggest these exercises in a timely fashion.

In her book *The How of Happiness* (2007), Sonia Lyubomirsky provides research within the field of Positive Psychology to support a full range of exercises and activities designed to help us to cultivate an increased sense of well-being and life satisfaction. She tells us that our happiness set point is determined by 3 different factors: genetics (50%), circumstances (10%), and your actions and attitudes (40%).

Given the context of a university setting, I created the ThriveRU Weekly Workbook with exercises that I linked to the specific challenges we know our students are likely to face each week in the semester. Many of the sources for these weekly exercises are from research compiled by Sonia Lyubomirsky. I have also referred to exercises developed by Shawn Achor, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, Jon Kabat Zinn, Christine Padesky, Sharon Saltzburg, and Martin Seligman. The goal is to help students to cultivate resilience as they go through their postsecondary education.

The Facilitator's Resource Manual and The ThriveRU Weekly Workbook were written by Dr. Diana Brecher, Scholar-in-Residence, Positive Psychology for the ThriveRU initiative, Ryerson Student Affairs.

# ThriveRU Calendar at a Glance: Academic Year

Week 1:

**Making New Friends and Strengthening Your Connections with Old Friends**

Week 2:

**Gratitude**

Week 3:

**Cultivating Optimism**

Week 4:

**Living in the Present Moment**

Week 5:

**Coping Strategies**

Week 6:

**Growth Mindset**

Week 7:

**Practicing Acts of Kindness and Generosity**

Week 8:

**Increasing Flow**

Week 9:

**Learning to Forgive**

Week 10:

**Committing to Your Goals**

Week 11:

**Physical Activity and Exercise**

Week 12:

**Meditation**

Week 13:

**Savouring Life's Joys (Past, Present, and Future)**

View this year's dates  
at [ryerson.ca/thriveru](https://ryerson.ca/thriveru)

# The 5 Factor Model of Resilience: A Background for the ThriveRU Weekly Workbook

By Dr. Diana Brecher

When I was a little girl I used to wish upon a star; you know: “Star light, star bright, first star I see tonight, I wish I may, I wish I might, have this wish I wish tonight—I wish everyone was healthy and happy.” To my child’s mind it seemed to cover everything. It was the wish that encompassed all other wishes (as I had been taught through the fairy tales I loved). It was my way of making a difference in the world, the best way I knew how. I have since learned the Lovingkindness Meditation (out of the Mindfulness Meditation tradition) that covers much of the same ground—but I’m getting ahead of myself.

Fast-forward to adulthood, I studied to become a clinical psychologist and began working at Ryerson’s counselling centre. My job, in some sense, was to help “everyone become healthy and happy”. After 25 years of working as a counsellor, manager, intern supervisor, and instructor, I started to wonder if there was a more direct way to reach the same goal.

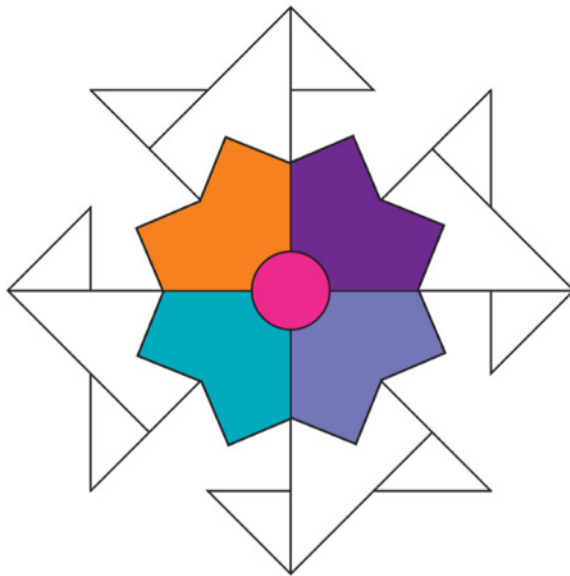
Positive psychology (a relatively new discipline) tells us that there are 6 dimensions of well-being and flourishing: positivity, engagement, relationships, meaning, achievement, and vitality. Throughout all six dimensions you will find talk of resilience, an integral aspect of flourishing. I became really interested in how to teach resilience as prevention—and reduce the need for intervention after the fact. My goal became to teach resilience so that people could bounce back (thriving) before they got stuck in distress in the first place.

I thought about what my years as a psychologist taught me, about the difference between surviving and thriving; and built this profile of someone who is struggling to thrive:

- She tends to ruminate about the past and worry about the future;
- She seems to be unaware of the good things that are happening in her life;
- She explains why things happen to her from a pessimistic perspective;
- She is judgmental and self-critical;
- She often gives up when feeling overwhelmed.

If resilience is best defined as the capacity to bounce back after things go wrong, then what do people need to learn in order to thrive?

After considerable research into the field of Positive Psychology, I created a 5 Factor Model of Resilience. Think of it as a puzzle with mindfulness in the centre, and going clockwise: gratitude, optimism, self-compassion, and grit. Each component of this puzzle connects and augments the others, particularly in times of crisis.



## The Five Factor Model of Resilience

**Mindfulness**  
**Gratitude**  
**Optimism**  
**Compassion**  
**Grit**

*The 5 Factor Model is developed by Dr Diana Brecher, from research in the field of Positive Psychology.*

### **Mindfulness**

I think of the absence of mindfulness as a form of time travel—either ruminating about the past and/or worrying about the future. Mindfulness is about being simply present at this very moment. It allows us to take stock and gather resources. Being mindful keeps us grounded in the actual situation and realistically focused on solutions and actions that will make a difference.

### **Gratitude**

Gratitude is not simply saying thank you when someone does you a favor. Gratitude in this context is about noticing good things that are happening all around you, and taking it in; savoring good experiences, the kindness and generosity of others, and opportunities that have opened up and the possibilities that you could explore. It's about the relationships between you and others and the expression of your gratitude to these important people in your life that seems to make life worth living. Gratitude also allows you to feel connected and hopeful about these possibilities.

### **Optimism**

The ways in which we explain why good things happen to us and why bad things happen to us has a significant impact on our ability to bounce back. Changing these explanations is something that can be learned. Martin Seligman, a psychologist at the University of Pennsylvania, discovered that optimists explain good times to themselves as something that they caused

directly or had a significant role in instigating; they perceive it as permanent; and it spills over into other aspects of their lives. Optimists end up feeling the glow of achievement and have hope in the future. Similarly, when something bad happens, optimists explain it to themselves as bad luck, temporary, and very situation specific. As optimists, we have more energy to be resilient and take action to resolve challenging situations because we haven't spent our energy feeling scared, filled with self-recrimination, and hopelessness the way that pessimists tend to do.

### **Self-Compassion**

When things go wrong we tend to blame ourselves for everything, being highly self-critical and impatient with our ever- so-human flaws. Kristen Neff, a psychologist at the University of Texas at Austin, asks: what if, instead of being so self-critical, we were able to be our own best friend? Kind, supportive, patient, loving—in the moment that we need it most? Cultivating this attitude of being your own best friend is integral to resilience.

### **Grit**

Grit has been defined by Angela Duckworth, a psychologist at the University of Pennsylvania, as perseverance and passion for very long term goals, in a wide range of contexts. I believe that cultivating grit in reference to overcoming setbacks, losses, and hurdles in our personal lives is equally essential to persevering in service of achievement. Grit is essential to my 5 Factor Model of Resilience because it is based on a choice we can make to stick to our goals despite the obstacles we face, and because we already have these attitudes and skills of resilience within ourselves; even when we don't think we do.

### **Personal Model Of Resilience**

I believe that we can tap the strategies, behaviors, attitudes, and beliefs that fuel our grit in one context in which we are successful, and import these to a different area of our lives where we are struggling. This is the essence of resilience. Christine Padesky, a psychologist and author of *Mind Over Mood*, suggests that when we do something we love on a regular basis, we keep going, no matter what; obstacles are seen as temporary and surmountable. Our faith in these successful strategies and attitudes is justified because they are familiar and trustworthy in one context—all we need to do is transpose these to another situation and discover how they work there. By bringing our behaviors from a successful context to an area where we are struggling, we are able to deal with the completely new challenge and succeed. Recognising these strategies, behaviours, attitudes, and beliefs becomes our personal model of resilience. So there we have it: being fully present and mindful; noticing the good things in life and all the possibilities before you; giving yourself credit for the good things that happen, with hope and zest for the future; forgiving yourself for things that have gone wrong; and tapping your already proven strengths to use them in service of the challenge before you. A five factor model of resilience; grounded in best practices research within the field of positive psychology and flourishing, and 25 years-experience working with university students who want to thrive and be their best selves.

*This article was originally published in the magazine TEDxRyersonU: Lenses in March 2017.*

I hope that the Five Factor Model of Resilience provides a context within which you understand why these exercises can lead us to thrive.





**Fall  
Term**

# Week 1:

## Making New Friends and Strengthening Your Connections with Old Friends

During the first few weeks of term, building community is an important task for most students. Research in Positive Psychology tells us that the happier you are, the more likely it is that you will have good friends. The deeper the friendships you have, the happier you feel. The good news is that you can increase your happiness by building and strengthening your friendships. We all need three good friends to give us a sense of belonging.

### Exercise:

Be willing to open up to your friends. Mutual sharing is what leads to real intimacy. Listen, give your friends 100% of your attention, and maintain eye contact when they are talking about something important. Tell them how much you appreciate them and value this time together. Universal rules of friendship include: keep their secrets, be loyal, and be at least as generous with them as they are with you. Hug your friends when you say hello and say goodbye.

#### **Why is this Important to Students Now:**

Building community during the first few weeks of term enhances sense of belonging. When a student develops friendships with their classmates (and roommates) it leads to a significant increase in student retention and academic success. Cultivating new friendships in this new context can be a make or break condition for remaining in one's academic program.

#### **Leading the Exercise:**

Building community is important to us all. The best way to teach this exercise is through how we behave at work. Group norms and dynamics can be modeled for your students. If you aren't already doing so, give your students 100% of your attention, maintain eye contact while they are talking, and tell them how much you appreciate their efforts. A respectful environment, where people demonstrate their appreciation for others, sets a great tone and expectations that can be carried forward into new contexts.

#### **Resources: TEDx talks on different aspects of friendship**

- Why can't we be friends? | Dr. Jill Squyres | TEDxVail  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZBoOEbwgStw>
- The Essential Truths of Friendship: Catherine Cook at TEDxBayArea  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=at81UEpuWyo>

# Week 1:

## Making New Friends and Strengthening Your Connections with Old Friends

What was the impact of putting more effort into the quality of your friendships? Did it make a difference?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

# Week 2:

## Gratitude

Adapting to any new environment involves paying close attention to and assessing your strengths and weaknesses. Noticing opportunities and possibilities, and feeling grateful for the good things that happen in the course of a day, can boost your well-being and happiness overall. Gratitude strengthens the bonds of friendship and other connections to classmates, roommates, instructors, teaching assistants, staff, and helps you to cope with stress. Gratitude also increases the intensity and pleasure associated with savouring positive experiences.

### Exercise:

Express gratitude for the first time to someone to whom you feel grateful by writing them a letter. Be specific as to why, based on your shared experiences. Print it and read it to them. Give them the letter when you are done.

#### **Why is this Important to Students Now:**

Gratitude strengthens the bonds of friendship and other connections to classmates, instructors, teaching assistants, increases focus on possibilities and thereby helps our students to cope with stress.

#### **Leading the Exercise:**

Write letters of gratitude to your students to demonstrate how powerful they can be, and notice what changes for both of you. Encourage your students to write their own gratitude letter. Questions you can ask your student after he or she has written the letter could include:

1. Did you feel differently about the relationship after writing the letter?
2. How does the feeling of gratitude shift things for you?
3. Do you feel happier after sharing the letter than before writing it?

#### **Resources:**

- Watch this “Experiment in Gratitude” together to introduce the exercise <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oHv6vTKD6lg>

# Week 2:

## Gratitude

Did you start to notice new possibilities by paying attention to the good things in life?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

# Week 3:

## Cultivating Optimism

Optimism is about how you explain to yourself why things happen to you. This means choosing how you see the world and your role in it. Pessimistic thinking can interfere with productivity, resilience, and focus. Optimistic thinkers have more hope and energy to deal with the bad times because we explain the good times as something we did to make it happen, and we see it as permanent and pervasive. By the third week of term your workload is beginning to sink in and you may start questioning your academic choices and ability to deliver on the expectations your instructors have for you.

### Exercise:

Ask yourself when something good happens:

- (1) What role did I play making this happen?
- (2) How can I make this permanent?
- (3) What can I do to have this spill over into other aspects of my life?

Ask yourself when something bad happens:

- (1) In what way is this also the responsibility of others or circumstances beyond my control?
- (2) How can I keep this temporary?
- (3) What must I do to contain the damage or the long-term effects of this event?

#### **Why is this Important to Students Now:**

By the third week of term the workload is beginning to sink in and some of our students may start to question their academic choices and ability to deliver on the expectations their instructors have for them.

#### **Leading the Exercise:**

Try this exercise yourself and discover how much energy you gain from re-framing bad events as time limited, situation specific that no longer haunt you and re-framing good events as filled with new possibilities that you made happen, and fuel the belief that the good times are here to stay. Try asking these questions as part of project debriefs during student-staff meetings or during 1:1s. If they struggle to answer the questions, offer alternative views they may not have considered.

Watch this video on Optimists and Pessimists: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IP057eHTIZE>

# Week 3:

## Cultivating Optimism

Were you able to flip into an optimistic frame of mind?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

# Week 4:

## Living in the Present Moment

The capacity to be fully present and focused will reduce the impact of anxiety and stress, which tends to overwhelm at this time of year. The “honeymoon” period is over and your academic demands are increasing. There is a tendency to imagine the worst and feel stuck ruminating over what might go wrong. When you compare yourself to others you are less likely to focus on working through your problems and taking appropriate action. Gaining perspective on the most likely consequences of a situation can be very helpful.

### Exercise:

In order to solve a problem:

1. Imagine what would happen in the worst case scenario (be creative, generate several worst case scenarios, and give yourself permission to imagine the worst possible outcomes). Assign a percentage point to each of these options regarding how likely are they to happen.
2. Generate the best case scenarios - be optimistic and creative and generate the ideal outcomes to these scenarios. Assign percentage points to each of these best case scenarios.
3. Consider the most likely scenarios. Assign percentage points to each.
4. Develop an action plan based on the most likely scenarios.

If this is a problem you must solve - then solve it and learn the lessons this process has taught you along the way (patience, perseverance, compassion, courage, loyalty, etc.).

#### **Why is this Important to Students Now:**

The “honeymoon” period is over and academic demands are increasing. There is a tendency to imagine the worst and feel stuck ruminating over what might go wrong. Thinking things through objectively can be very helpful in taking charge of the situation and develop an action plan.

#### **Leading the Exercise:**

When you want to broaden a student’s perspective who seems locked into only one viewpoint—try this exercise with them. By elaborating on, and assigning percentages to each scenario, your student will become more open to a more realistic perspective—the most likely one. From there an action plan is possible.



# Week 4:

## Living in the Present Moment

Solve a problem by itemizing what would happen in each scenario.

### Step by Step Process:

1. Identify the trigger and recognize what is worrying you.
2. List the Worst-Case Scenario thoughts.
3. Identify the percentage likelihood of these Worst-Case Scenario thoughts, given the trigger.
4. List the Best Case Scenario thoughts.
5. Identify the percentage likelihood of the Best Case Scenario thoughts, given the trigger.
6. List the Most Likely Scenario thoughts.
7. Identify the percentage likelihood of the Most Likely Thoughts given the trigger.
8. Create an action plan based on the Most Likely Scenarios.

### For example:

Identify the Trigger: I will fail this exam

Worst Case Scenarios	%	Most Likely Scenarios	%	Best Case Scenarios	%
Failing this exam means that I will fail this course, and have to drop out of school	10	I will pass the exam (because I studied hard with a classmate and went to office hours for extra help)	60	I get an A+ on this exam	0

Crete a Plan: Given the most likely scenario, I can...

Find a study buddy and spend the time I need to review the material and do practice questions. I can go to office hours and get extra help. I can get a good night's sleep the night before and make sure I eat a nutritious breakfast before the exam.

# Week 5:

## Coping Strategies

Learning to cope during the good times is in itself a good strategy—you can rely on it when you hit a rough patch. Doing things differently (dealing with things head on) and thinking about things differently (becoming more hopeful and optimistic) are both good ideas.

### Exercise:

Coping sheet: Divide a page into 4 quadrants - at the top write “day” and “night”, along the sides write “alone” and “with others” :

Make a list of activities that can help you to cope in each quadrant. For example: during the day, when alone—reading a good novel, going for a run, painting, meditating; with others—texting your best friend and making plans to get together, shoot hoops, ask for help, etc. Complete the chart with ideas in all 4 circumstances (day and night, with others and alone). Put these ideas somewhere convenient (like on your phone) and pick the one that makes the most sense when you are stressed out. Add to it as new ideas come to you.

#### **Why is this Important to Students Now:**

As the mid-term exam season approaches, our students are feeling the crunch and need to be reminded of all the ways in which they can self-care and reach out for support as needed. Making a plan in advance will condense the amount of time they spend feeling stuck and these activities and supports will help the student to bounce back faster.

#### **Leading the Exercise:**

If the student with whom you are meeting is clearly overwhelmed, you can show them this graph and begin to fill it out together. If you find that the student is clearly struggling to identify strategies that have worked for them in the past, they may need more than this strategy and a referral to other resources on campus may be appropriate.

Consider these possible campus resources (depending on the nature of the distress with which the student presents):

- Counselling Centre—if your student reports significant difficulties focusing, getting out of bed, constant worrying, and unable to utilize their regular coping strategies.
- Student Success Centre—if your student reports that they are disorganized and unable to keep up with their academic commitments.

# Week 5:

## Coping Strategies

List your coping strategies

	Day	Night
Alone		
With others		

# Week 6:

## Growth Mindset

Use curiosity and an open mind when engaged in learning. Learning takes effort and a willingness to feel stuck at some points. Adopt the attitude: “I’m not sure I can do it now, but I think I can learn to with time and effort.” Praise yourself for the effort and hard work that you put into a project—it will sustain you over time.

### Exercise:

- Watch Carol Dweck’s TED talk on Growth Mindset: [https://www.ted.com/talks/carol\\_dweck\\_the\\_power\\_of\\_believing\\_that\\_you\\_can\\_improve/transcript?language=en](https://www.ted.com/talks/carol_dweck_the_power_of_believing_that_you_can_improve/transcript?language=en)
- Approach each assignment or task this week with an attitude of curiosity and enthusiasm for learning, trusting that if you put in the effort you will overcome the challenge.

#### **Why is this Important to Students Now:**

Some of our students will have just completed their midterms; others may be preparing to write them next week upon return from Study Break. Either way, some students may be surprised at how much work it takes to do well, and could be feeling discouraged by the difficulty some courses may be presenting. Providing the growth mindset perspective is a gift; conveying it with compassion and enthusiasm for the effort needed and your belief in the likelihood of success can go a long way in bolstering a discouraged student and getting back on the path to success.

#### **Leading the Exercise:**

Watch Carol Dweck’s talk together and talk about what it means to your student. Is it inspiring? Ask them how they can apply these principles to the courses they are currently taking. The workbook has additional questions for your students to consider. Encourage your students to tap into existing Ryerson resources if part of the effort needed involves a tutor, finding a study buddy or group, attending office hours with the Instructor, or simply allocating more time to studying.

Watch animated film on Growth Mindset: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=75GFzikhmRY0>

# Week 6:

## Growth Mindset

What did you feel after watching Carol Dweck's TED talk on Growth Mindset? How can you cultivate an attitude of curiosity and enthusiasm for learning?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

# Week 7:

## Practicing Acts of Kindness and Generosity

Practicing acts of kindness and generosity leads to raising your overall level of happiness. The more you give to others the better you feel about yourself. There is often a “pay it forward” ripple effect, and those who received your act of kindness or generosity are more likely to do something similar for someone else. It is a great way to bring about change in your community, one step at a time, by modeling it.

### Exercise:

- As you go through your day, be aware of the needs of others and make an effort to reach out to help them in some way. Pay attention to what it feels like to be generous with your time and skills. Vary your acts of kindness and notice what it says about you that you took the time to be of help to someone. Which values do these acts of generosity express?

#### **Why is this Important to Students Now:**

Students will discover how good they feel by giving to others, particularly at a time when they may feel depleted after mid-terms. The glow of well-being that results from acts of kindness and generosity can also be especially helpful for students who are feeling disconnected or dissatisfied with their present life. By reinvesting in community building through these acts they can give themselves a boost of energy that will help propel them through the rest of term.

#### **Leading the Exercise:**

Talk with your students about how it feels when they are the recipient of an act of kindness or generosity and ask them if it inspires them to pay it forward. Pose this exercise as something to try as an experiment and suggest that the student will discover how they can make a difference in small but important ways. It increases a sense of empowerment and self-efficacy.

# Week 7:

## Practicing Acts of Kindness and Generosity

In what ways did these random acts of kindness improve your life or mood?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

# Week 8:

## Increasing Flow

Increasing flow involves feelings of intense absorption in whatever activity in which you are engaged. You feel engaged and excited and your skills are just enough to meet the challenge. Flow experiences can happen at school, work, and play. Boredom or anxiety occur when the challenge is too low (leading to boredom) or your skills are too low (resulting in anxiety). You can move into Flow by either increasing the challenge or acquiring more skills. Flow results in a subjective sense that time is passing differently (faster or slower, depending on context).

### Exercise:

- Fully focus your attention on what you are doing. Try not to let yourself get distracted by non-related concerns. Be wholeheartedly open to new and different experiences and be willing to learn new things all the time. Look for high-challenge, high-skill situations and take on new challenges as you become comfortable with the old ones. Know which activities bring on Flow for you and do more of them. If you are anxious—increase your skills through working harder and smarter. If you are bored—take on new challenges. The easiest way to get into flow is to have clear rules for performance, immediate feedback, doing things that allow for some control over your work (exams, assignments, presentations), and ensure that the challenge matches your skills.
- Read *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Performance* by Csikszentmihalyi
- Watch “Flow by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi + The rise of superman by Steven Kotler book review mix” here: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=69\\_RfIAAuHE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=69_RfIAAuHE)



# Week 8:

## Increasing Flow

What circumstances bring Flow into your life?

What is your plan to increase your challenges or skills?

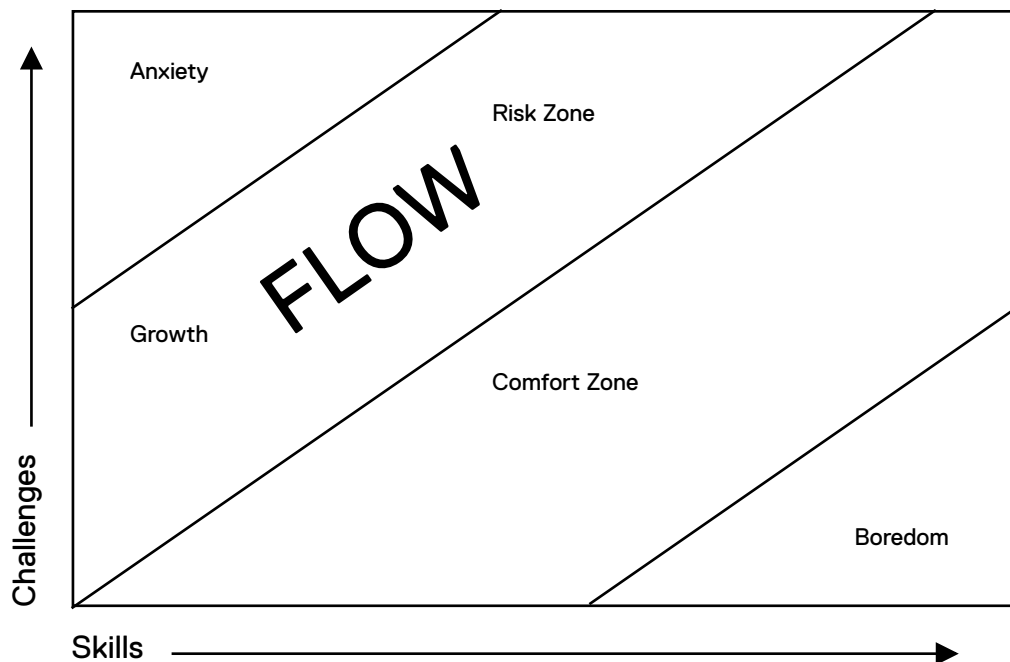
### Why is this Important to Students Now:

As assignments, tests, and projects demand more and more attention and effort from students, and the need to juggle multiple commitments such as school, jobs, family obligations, social life increases, they will benefit from understanding that they can intentionally increase their skills if they are anxious, or increase the challenge if they are bored. Knowing that they are in control of these things can lead to a sense of empowerment and a greater likelihood that they will get into flow.

### Leading the Exercise:

Students who are bored in class can be encouraged to seek new challenges within the context of the course, or through extracurricular activities related to the topic. Students who are feeling anxious about their performance can be encouraged to increase their skills through tutoring, cultivating a study group, attending office hours with the instructor, and growth mindset. Explaining Flow as the midpoint between boredom and anxiety is a great starting point. Unpack the diagram below with your student and ask them what kinds of situations have led to Flow in their lives? Explore with them how does it feel to be so engaged in something that time seems to pass differently?

The Process of Flow: The mid-point between Anxiety and Boredom



# Week 9:

## Learning to Forgive

The person who benefits most from forgiveness is yourself. Holding on to disappointment, resentment, and anger only serves to hurt you in the long run. Not forgiving is like holding a burning hot rock and expecting the person you can't forgive to get burnt.

### Exercise:

- Remember a time when someone forgave you. How did they express their forgiveness to you? How did you react? What were the benefits of being forgiven and what did you learn from the experience? How did your relationship change as a result of you being forgiven?
- After this reflection, consider forgiving yourself for an error in judgement or thoughtlessness. Self-compassion is about being your own best friend—supportive, gentle, and understanding without any judgement. This is a gift that you give yourself.
- Watch Dr. Kristen Neff on self-compassion: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lvTZBUSplr4>

#### **Why is this Important to Students Now:**

This time of year is particularly stressful for students with multiple assignments and obligations, roommate conflict, money crunch, and identity issues. Self-compassion can be very helpful when dealing with these stressors; learning to let go and move on without being overly self-critical will assist your student in bouncing back from hard times, ready to take on new challenges.

#### **Leading the Exercise:**

When students are being very self-critical and harsh with themselves, you can introduce the concept of self-compassion. Learning to forgive yourself (and others) is a wonderful skill and adding it to one's survival tool kit will result in increased resilience and positive emotion. Watch the TED talk together and discuss it with your student. This will get them thinking about self-compassion and then you can introduce the exercise.

Consider asking your student about a time that someone showed incredible compassion and sensitivity towards them. What was the context? What did this person say and how did they say it? What tone of voice did they use, and how did they demonstrate compassion? And most importantly, how did your student feel after being the recipient of compassion by someone who cares deeply? Once you have helped your student to recall the situation in full, they will be better equipped to intentionally engage in self-compassion.

# Week 9:

## Learning to Forgive

How has forgiveness (of others or yourself) enriched your life?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

# Week 10:

## Committing to your Goals

Pursuing goals gives you a sense of meaning and purpose, and achieving your goals makes you happier in the long term. They improve your time and task management skills because you must get organized in pursuit of goals. Choose personally meaningful goals based on your own values and interests.

### Exercise:

Identify your top priority goals and rank order them. Break down your top goal into subgoals, including specifically when, where, and how you can begin to work on these subgoals. Consider obstacles you might encounter and brainstorm solutions or action plans to deal with these obstacles. Carry out the goals with lots of support from family and friends. Remember to consider: are you approaching a desirable goal or trying to avoid an undesirable one? It is easier to accomplish a goal if you conceive of it as doing something proactive (e.g., I plan to eat healthy foods with good portion control) instead of avoiding what you don't want to do (don't eat tempting snacks).

#### **Why is this Important to Students Now:**

The workload is intensifying as students enter into the final stretch of the term and the only way to get through it all is to prioritize. Keeping in mind their long term goals will support the necessary attitudes and actions associated with success. Finding strategies to persevere through multiple school tasks and obligations (group work, assignments, quizzes, tests, projects, lab reports, etc.) will serve them well in the long run.

#### **Leading the Exercise:**

Students who feel overwhelmed by school obligations can benefit from this exercise of goal setting and taking these concrete actions to take control over their time. Managing their energy is as critical as managing their time. Engage in a discussion regarding time and task management and then suggest the goal setting exercise. Stick around to brainstorm solutions and action plans. Encourage students to use a primer as a magnet and motivator.

The Harvard Business Review Article below has an excellent self-assessment tool with respect to how effective you are managing your energy. Is also a very interesting article about how these concepts have been applied in the business sector. It is a fairly simple matter to transpose the application of these concepts to an academic setting.

<https://hbr.org/2007/10/manage-your-energy-not-your-time>

# Week 10:

## Committing to your Goals

Has this exercise moved you closer to achieving your goals? What is the effect of framing your goals in positive terms (i.e. the presence, rather than the absence, of something)?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

# Week 11:

## Physical Activity and Exercise

Physical activity and exercise increases quality of life, improves mood, reduces anxiety and stress, increases focus and attention, and improves quality of sleep. Moderate physical activity 3 times a week is a great place to start if you are not already active.

### Exercise:

Choose something you enjoy doing and fits your personality and lifestyle; it can be a class at the gym, a team sport, or following a DVD alone at home. Decide when, where, and for how long you intend to exercise and keep to that schedule. Try to choose a time of day when you have the most energy. If you can't keep your schedule on one occasion don't let it stop you from going right back to exercise as soon as you have the time.

#### **Why is this Important to Students Now:**

Self-care is very important for the final stretch of the term—as academic demands continue to increase and multi-tasking becomes the norm. There are many benefits that will serve to make your student more resilient in the face of these stressors - Physical exercise increases quality of life, improves mood, reduces anxiety and stress, increases focus and attention, and improves quality of sleep.

#### **Leading the Exercise:**

Being a role model in this area is often a good way to encourage exercise in others. Talk about your own exercise program, mention our Mood Walks initiative, Wellness Wednesdays and classes at the RAC, or watch this health promotion video, 23 ½ hours by Dr. Mike Evans with your student and talk about what it can mean for the future: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aUalnS6HIGo>

Questions to start the conversation could be as simple as:

1. Do you have an exercise routine? If the response is that they used to exercise regularly before school got too stressful, you can ask:
  - What did it feel like to exercise regularly? How did you organize your time differently so that it was possible to fit everything in?
  - What benefits did you notice when you had a regular routine?
  - How can you bring back this stress busting strategy into your day to day life today?
2. If your student typically does not exercise, ask them what strategies work best to manage stress? Whatever the stress management activity is, are they using it right now or have they given it up in service of trying to buy more time for all their obligations? Encouraging your student to go back to what has always worked for them is a great first step.

# Week 11:

## Physical Activity and Exercise

What helped you to exercise regularly? While monitoring your productivity, focus, quality of sleep and mood—in what ways did these change as a result of regular exercise?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

# Week 12:

## Meditation

Cultivating attention with regular practice can lead to increased happiness and well-being. Regular meditation impacts one's level of stress, cognitive functioning, and physical well-being. It tends to increase a sense of alertness, as well as relaxation.

### Exercise:

3 minute breathing space: Sit comfortably bringing length to your spine and keep a sense of softness in your posture. Rest your hands in your lap and tuck in your chin slightly. Close your eyes. Bring your awareness inwardly and focus on your breath. Pay attention to the inhale and the exhale. Focus your awareness to your breath. There's no need to change it. Just notice the rhythm and pace of your breath. Bring your awareness to the physical sensations in your body including places of pressure, contact, or temperature. Now bring your awareness to your thoughts; notice what is popping into your mind. Just notice your thoughts and let them go. Bring your awareness to your feelings, noticing any qualities but not getting wrapped up in what they mean. Expand your awareness to your whole body. Get a sense of your whole self being here in the present moment. Imagine your whole body breathing with each inhale and exhale. PAUSE. When you're ready, open your eyes and bring your awareness back into the room to close the practice.

#### **Why is this Important to Students Now:**

This is a time of year when daily self-care can make the difference between getting it all done on time and falling behind on assignments and projects. If the school term were a marathon this might be where your students hit the "wall". Daily self-care in the form of a 3 minute meditation can keep students grounded and focused and able to manage the stress of too many demands all at once. It is almost like a reset button that can be pushed in the midst of daily chaos.

#### **Leading the Exercise:**

Invite your student to do a brief mindfulness meditation with you leading it. Give your student a copy of the script and encourage your student to try it on their own.

You can also provide these websites with audio recordings of guided meditations:

- <http://www.freemindfulness.org/download>
- <http://youth.anxietybc.com/relaxation>
- <http://ryersonstudentaffairs.com/3-minute-breathing-space-meditation/>

There is also a great app: Insight Meditation Timer (<https://insighttimer.com/>).



# Week 12:

## Meditation

How did this meditation make you feel? Did the three minutes of quiet breathing and reflection reset your energy?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

# Week 13:

## Savouring Life's Joys (Past, Present, and Future)

Classes are over and exams are beginning—staying grounded can involve taking the time to remember the good times, be fully present (appreciating what is happening right now), and optimistically anticipating the times that make life worth living. Use all of your senses to recall a pleasant experience, to fully engage in the present joys, and to imagine a future event by considering all aspects of it.

### Exercise:

- Relish ordinary experiences—take the time to slow down and focus on appreciating the things we normally take for granted. Take a few moments to reflect and appreciate pleasurable experiences. It can be as simple as smelling baked bread or a fresh cup of coffee, or noticing the calm of a sunset.
- Reminisce with friends or family about shared experiences—enjoy sharing your memories and remembering a bit differently by listening to what they recall—thereby enriching both of your experiences of savouring.
- Transport yourself—travel to a place that has always brought you peace or pleasure or comfort by using your imagination to recreate it and bring it back when you need it. Have a list of places that you love and spend the time to recall all aspects of it using all of your senses. Go there in your mind when you feel stressed out and need a few minutes to re-charge. Try doing this twice a week.

#### **Why is this Important to Students Now:**

Classes are ending and exams are about to begin. During this particularly high stress time of pending exams, a reminder that life is filled with wonderful experiences and staying connected to these moments is what can help our students feel grounded and calm when faced with intense pressures to perform.

#### **Leading the Exercise:**

You can help your students by reminding them to be fully present, remember good times, and optimistically anticipating the times that make life worth living. I recommend doing the third exercise with your student to activate their imagination and re-introduce pleasure and calm into their increasingly hectic lives. Remind your student that in order to visualize their favorite place with all their senses, they need to focus on what they see, hear, touch, smell, and feel. This exercise can serve to relax as well as comfort, stimulate as well as invigorate. It may be helpful to ask your student to describe the place to you first, and then to take the time to “travel” there in their imagination later.

One great resource for this is the book *Calm Your Mind Warm Your Heart* by Catherine Phillips (2013). The section on guided imagery is very well written.

# Week 13:

## Savouring Life's Joys (Past, Present, and Future)

Which of these exercises of savouring had the greatest impact and why?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---



**Winter  
Term**

# Week 1:

## Making New Friends and Strengthening Your Connections with Old Friends

During the first few weeks of term, building community is an important task for most students. Research in Positive Psychology tells us that the happier you are, the more likely it is that you will have good friends. The deeper the friendships you have, the happier you feel. The good news is that you can increase your happiness by building and strengthening your friendships. We all need three good friends to give us a sense of belonging.

### Exercises:

1. Make time to make friends and show interest in what is important to them. Create a regular time (preferably on a weekly basis) to get together and do something—go to the gym, meet for coffee, play on a baseball team, or join a student group together.
2. When thinking about long term friends—you can further enhance your connection by doing these over several days or weeks:
  - Write a list of what initially drew you to this friend and elaborate with examples.
  - Write about an especially good time in your friendship.
  - Remember a time when your friend disappointed you and try to come up with a generous explanation for why they behaved as they did.
  - Write about values and goals that you both share.

#### **Why is this Important to Students Now:**

During the first few weeks of term, building community is an important task for most students. It enhances sense of belonging, and students tend to thrive when they feel connected, have friends with whom they can study, and with whom they share values and priorities.

#### **Leading the Exercise:**

Explain that building community is important to us all for a sense of belonging and connection. Productivity and learning increase when we feel grounded in our environments and knowing that we are important to our friends and family. Encourage your students to give their classmates and peers 100% of their attention, actively listen to them, and maintain eye contact while their friends are talking. Suggest that spending time to reflect on what has deepened their best friendships can result in a stronger bond and insights on how to create new friendships in the future. All friendships require regular nurturance and attention.

# Week 1:

## Making New Friends and Strengthening Your Connections with Old Friends

Have you been able to strengthen your friendships by spending quality time together? Did your weekly exploration (of what drew you to your friends and the values you share) deepen these friendships?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

# Week 2:

## Gratitude

Adapting to any new environment involves paying close attention to and assessing your strengths and weaknesses. Noticing opportunities and possibilities, and feeling grateful for the good things that happen in the course of a day, can boost your well-being and happiness overall. Gratitude strengthens the bonds of friendship and other connections to classmates, roommates, instructors, teaching assistants, staff, and helps you to cope with stress. Gratitude also increases the intensity and pleasure associated with savouring positive experiences.

### Exercise:

Keep a gratitude journal—every Sunday evening, think about 3 good things that happened during the week, your role in making them happen (if any), and what it means to you and/or your future that these events or interactions happened.

#### **Why is this Important to Students Now:**

Post-secondary education is a setting that provides all kinds of opportunities for students. Being open to these possibilities and tapping the resources available is essential for their success. When they begin to notice good things that are happening all around them, early on during the term, it will increase the likelihood that they will take advantage of the resources and opportunities around them.

#### **Leading the Exercise:**

Watch this TED talk together and discuss how the beautiful scenes, images, and ideas can inspire gratitude in you for the most basic aspects of everyday life:

- Nature. Beauty. Gratitude. — Louie Schwartzberg  
[https://www.ted.com/talks/louie\\_schwartzberg\\_nature\\_beauty\\_gratitude](https://www.ted.com/talks/louie_schwartzberg_nature_beauty_gratitude)

Talk about what it means to you to think about the good things we all take for granted and start the conversation about paying attention to those things you appreciate. Introduce the idea of the gratitude journal and suggest that they monitor their sense of well-being over time. Does noticing these good things open them to new possibilities? Improve their mood? Some people decide to do this “3 good things” exercise daily, just before falling asleep, and report that it improves sleep as well.



# Week 2:

## Gratitude

How has writing in your gratitude journal opened up new possibilities for you?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

# Week 3:

## Cultivating Optimism

Optimism is about how you explain to yourself why things happen to you. This means choosing how you see the world and your role in it. Pessimistic thinking can interfere with productivity, resilience, and focus. Optimistic thinkers have more hope and energy to deal with the bad times because we explain the good times as something we did to make it happen, and we see it as permanent and pervasive. By the third week of term your workload is beginning to sink in and you may be questioning your academic choices and ability to deliver on the expectations your instructors have for you.

### Exercise:

Take 20 minutes, while sitting quietly, and imagine your best possible self; think about what you would like your life to be—one, five, or ten years from now. Imagine a future in which all your dreams have come true. You accomplished your goals and put in the effort necessary to reach them. Then break these up into sub goals, as one way of planning out how you will get there. Recall times that you have been successful at something and identify what strengths and resources you used to achieve your goal. Work on the details daily until it fully reflects your best possible future self.

#### **Why is this Important to Students Now:**

By the third week of term your students' workload is beginning to sink in and some of them may be questioning their academic choices and ability to deliver on the expectations their instructors have for them. Framing good and bad experiences from an optimistic perspective will leave your students with more energy and enthusiasm for the big challenges ahead.

#### **Leading the Exercise:**

Introduce the differences between optimism and pessimism, and discuss how each explanatory style, respectively, determines how resilient we may be in dealing with challenges. For example, a pessimist will blame themselves for things that go wrong, see the event as permanent and pervasive. An optimist will frame the same bad event as bad luck, situation specific and temporary. Discuss these different explanatory styles and ask your student to provide a relevant example. Similarly, when good things happen, a pessimist will explain the event as only due to good luck, and that the effects of this good event as both temporary and situation specific. Whereas an optimist will explain the same good event as something they had a hand in causing, and see it as permanent and pervasive. Explore examples with your student and review this chart with them as you discuss. Try doing this exercise yourself first, then talk about how it changed your perspective.

# Week 3:

## Cultivating Optimism

How did imagining your best possible future affect your mood? Are you more hopeful about what may happen?



This charming animated film on optimism and pessimism can start the conversation:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IP057eHTIZE>

# Week 4:

## Living in the Present Moment

The capacity to be fully present and focused will reduce the impact of anxiety and stress, which tends to overwhelm at this time of year. The “honeymoon” period is over and your academic demands are increasing. There is a tendency to imagine the worst and feel stuck ruminating over what might go wrong. When you compare yourself to others you are less likely to focus on working through your problems and taking appropriate action. Gaining perspective on the most likely consequences of a situation can be very helpful.

### Exercise:

- Give yourself the gift of perspective: imagine how important this concern might be in 5 or 10 years, or create an image of your problems as a dot on planet Earth, which is a small part of the solar system, and only a tiny part of the Milky Way... shrinking this problem down to a more realistic size.
- If this is a problem you must solve—then solve it and learn the lessons this process has taught you along the way (patience, perseverance, compassion, courage, loyalty, etc.)

#### **Why is this Important to Students Now:**

The “honeymoon” period is over and academic demands are increasing. There is a tendency to imagine the worst and feel stuck ruminating over what might go wrong. When students compare themselves to their classmates they are less likely to focus on working through their problems and taking appropriate action. Gaining perspective on the most likely consequences of a situation can be very helpful. Perspective mobilizes us and starts us on the path to taking charge of ourselves and our circumstances.

#### **Leading the Exercise:**

Encourage your student to be more flexible in their problem solving approach and shifting perspective by showing them the image of Milky Way and talk about how this different perspective can free up their creativity and innovative ideas in service of problem solving. For example, if your student is feeling stuck working on an essay, can they imagine themselves sitting in a library, doing a literature review, then imagine the library located on a map of Toronto, which is situated in the province of Ontario, in Canada, in North America, on planet earth, in our solar system, in the galaxy, in our universe... And then ask—does this shift your perspective on how important this literature review actually is in the larger scheme of things?

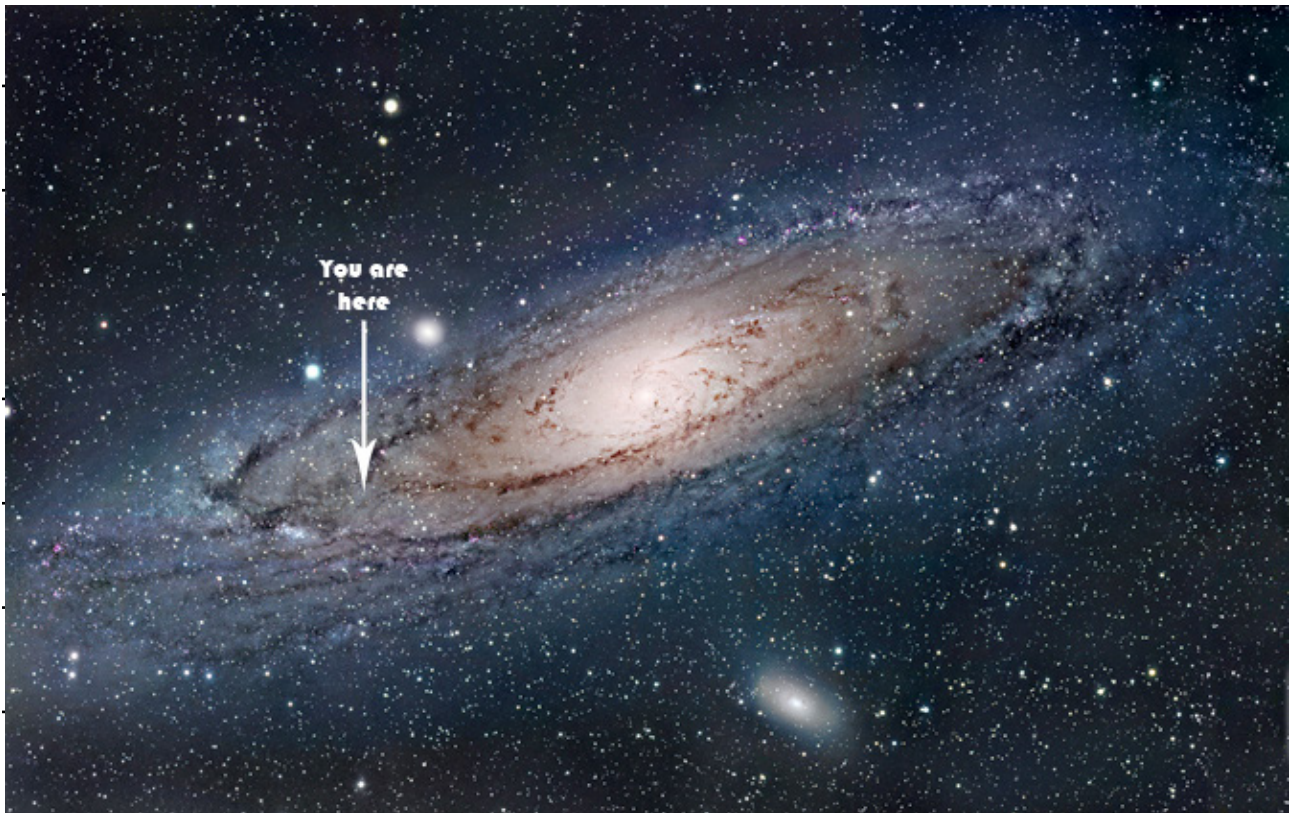
# Week 4:

## Living in the Present Moment

How did changing your perspective shift your view of a problem? What lessons did you learn by problem solving?

---

---



# Week 5:

## Coping Strategies

Learning to cope during the good times is in itself a good strategy—you can rely on it when you hit a rough patch. Doing things differently (dealing with things head on) and thinking about things differently (becoming more hopeful and optimistic) are both good ideas.

### Exercise:

Gaining perspective: for 15 minutes, four days in a row, write about a challenging event with which you are dealing. Explore your feelings and thoughts about what this means to you and how important it is for you to cope with this problem. Do you have any role models who coped with similar problems and are there actions you can emulate? Think about your support network (how can they help or support you) and try to put this situation in perspective (what this tells you about who you were in the past, how it affects your present and what, if any, future implications this challenge may bring).

#### **Why is this Important to Students Now:**

Just prior to midterms, learning to cope during the good times is in itself a good strategy—you can rely on it when you hit a rough patch. Doing things differently (dealing with things head on) and remembering how your role models coped, can be very useful when dealing with a new challenge.

#### **Leading the Exercise:**

Do the exercise yourself and if appropriate, share how it enabled you to cope more effectively. Did you have a role model who used specific coping strategies in a similar situation? Talk about how your role model showed you the way and perhaps how you adapted their attitudes and/or strategies to different situations. Without getting too personal, share the attitudes, strategies and stories of triumphing over adversity that you think might help your student in this situation. This endorsement can have a huge impact on your student who is struggling with a challenging situation.

# Week 5:

## Coping Strategies

How have your role models and/or support system helped you to cope?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

# Week 6:

## Growth Mindset

Use curiosity and an open mind when engaged in learning. Learning takes effort and a willingness to feel stuck at some points. Adopt the attitude: “I’m not sure I can do it now, but I think I can learn to with time and effort.” Praise yourself for the effort and hard work that you put into a project—it will sustain you over time.

### Exercise:

Don’t count on willpower alone to get the job done. Willpower diminishes as the day wears on, so you need other strategies to get things done. Instead: remove the first 20 seconds of obstacles to you working on the task, and then stick to it until you’re done. If you want to stop doing things—create 20 seconds of obstacles to stop you from starting the bad habit you are trying to break; make it effortful to engage in it, and you won’t.

#### **Why is this Important to Students Now:**

Reading week is a gift of time that can be used by your students for a range of activities (catching up on difficult coursework, taking a break from hard work, or reflecting on the challenges associated with sticking to their goals and study habits). Willpower is often misunderstood and relied upon with only moderate success. Trying a radical approach to study habits might be the best advice for your students if they are feeling overwhelmed and questioning their capacity to focus, to learn the material, and to achieve their career goals.

#### **Leading the Exercise:**

Try the 20 second rule on a specific habit you wish to change yourself and report on how what you did and effective it was to use this strategy. Ask your student which habit would they wish to start and brainstorm the most effective obstacles they can remove or insert in order to be effective. One example that demonstrates the use of a specific obstacle to stop doing something is: brush and floss your teeth immediately after dinner to quit late night snacking. Brushing and flossing your teeth serves as the 20 second obstacle to over eating and changing this habit.

Then watch either or both of these short talks:

- The Happiness Advantage (12 minutes): [https://www.ted.com/talks/shawn\\_achor\\_the\\_happy\\_secret\\_to\\_better\\_work](https://www.ted.com/talks/shawn_achor_the_happy_secret_to_better_work)
- 20 Second Rule (6 minutes) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mWipuE9FvFo>



# Week 6:

## Growth Mindset

Did you try to use the 20 Second Rule to add a new habit or to break on old one? What worked? What didn't work?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

# Week 7:

## Practicing Acts of Kindness and Generosity

Practicing acts of kindness and generosity leads to raising your overall level of happiness. The more you give to others the better you feel about yourself. There is often a “pay it forward” ripple effect, and those who received your act of kindness or generosity are more likely to do something similar for someone else. It is a great way to bring about change in your community, one step at a time, by modeling it.

### Exercise:

- Choose one day this week to be kind and considerate to others. These 5 acts of generosity don't need to be directed to the same person; or even to people you know:
  - Offer to fix something for a roommate.
  - Surprise a friend with a meal.
  - Smile at someone who is serving you in a store or restaurant.
  - Develop your compassion for others by imagining life from their perspective, and be generous.
  - Do a kind deed and don't tell anyone else about it.

#### **Why is this Important to Students Now:**

Some students may be feeling disconnected or dissatisfied with being back at university after a long winter break. By reinvesting in community-building through these acts of kindness they can give themselves a boost of energy that will help propel them through the rest of term. It may also increase a sense of belonging and connection with their community.

#### **Leading the Exercise:**

Ask your students about how it feels when they are the recipient of an act of kindness or generosity and ask them if it inspires them to pay it forward. Pose this exercise as something to try as an experiment and suggest that your student will discover how they can make a difference in small but important ways. It can increase a sense of empowerment and self-efficacy. Encourage them to track how they feel by writing in a journal after engaging in these behaviours.

# Week 7:

## Practicing Acts of Kindness and Generosity

How did these acts of kindness affect your sense of well-being and happiness?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

# Week 8:

## Increasing Flow

Increasing flow involves feelings of intense absorption in whatever activity in which you are engaged. You feel engaged and excited and your skills are just enough to meet the challenge. Flow experiences can happen at school, work, and play. Boredom or anxiety occur when the challenge is too low (leading to boredom) or your skills are too low (resulting in anxiety). You can move into Flow by either increasing the challenge or acquiring more skills. Flow results in a subjective sense that time is passing differently (faster or slower, depending on context).

### Exercise:

1. When in conversation, listen carefully and ask lots of follow up questions, such as "And then what happened?" and "Why did you think that?" This will engage you more fully. Make it a goal to learn more about the speaker as you are having this conversation.
2. Choose leisure activities that invite you to concentrate and challenge your mind or use your skills. Often these activities have clear goals and rules to guide you with immediate feedback to tell you how well you are doing (sports, games, playing a musical instrument, artistic activities, etc.).
3. Think about your studies as leading to your future. You get to decide if you will have a job, a career, or a calling. This depends on your willingness and ability to engage in Flow activities each step of the way. Consider this: a bricklayer working on a hospital can think of their work as laying bricks (a job), constructing a building (a career), or laying the foundation for a place of healing. When we see our work as a calling we take on extra challenges to more fully engage and live in Flow much more of the time.

# Week 8:

## Increasing Flow

Which activities are most likely to bring you into Flow? How can you do more of them?

**Why is this Important to Students Now:**

As the need to juggle multiple commitments such as school, jobs, family obligations, and social life increases, your students will need to be fully engaged in whatever they are doing. This engagement can be increasingly challenging but is necessary to success. Planning to intentionally increase one's skills if one is anxious, or increase the challenges if one is bored are effective strategies to accomplish flow.

**Leading the Exercise:**

Share a story of a time when you moved into Flow in your own life, as a way of getting the conversation started. Talk about Flow as an intentional focus on the present moment, being fully engaged and committed to whatever it is we are doing. Demonstrate that it requires self-awareness to recognize that when things aren't going well, it might be due to a lack of skill, and when one is bored, that it might be time to look for new challenges. Living in Flow both requires and leads to an attitude of engagement and excitement about one's life. Ask your student about the times when they were operating at peak performance. Are there external or internal conditions that could be replicated in an arena within which they are operating today? Do they need to increase skills or challenges in order to get into Flow now? How can you help?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

# Week 9:

## Learning to Forgive

The person who benefits most from forgiveness is yourself. Holding on to disappointment, resentment, and anger only serves to hurt you in the long run. Not forgiving is like holding a burning hot rock and expecting the person you can't forgive to get burnt.

### Exercise:

Write a letter of forgiveness to someone who has hurt you. Describe what they did and explain how it impacted you now and at the time. Tell this person how you wish they had behaved instead. At the end the letter clearly state that you have forgiven them. Decide if you want to send it to them, or not. Either way a weight should be lifted. Writing the letter is something you do for yourself, sending it (if appropriate and possible) is something you do for the other person and for the relationship.

#### **Why is this Important to Students Now:**

This time of year is particularly stressful with multiple assignments and obligations, roommate conflict, money crunch, and identity issues. Self-compassion can be very helpful when dealing with these stressors; learning to let go and move on without being overly self-critical will assist your student in bouncing back from hard times, ready to take on new challenges.

#### **Leading the Exercise:**

When students are being very self-critical and harsh with themselves, you can introduce the concept of self-compassion. Learning to forgive yourself (and others) is a wonderful skill and adding it to one's survival tool kit will result in increased resilience and positive emotion. Watch this TEDx talk with Dr. Kristen Neff together and discuss it with your student:

- The Space Between Self-Esteem and Self Compassion by Kristin Neff at TEDxCentennialParkWomen <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lvtZBUSplr4>

This will get them thinking about self-compassion and then you can introduce the exercise. You can ask your student: why now? What are they hoping to achieve if they can put this incident and/or relationship behind them? How will things be different in the future?

Self-compassion and forgiveness go hand in hand. When we are able to let go and forgive someone who has trespassed against us—it also creates space for us to forgive ourselves for being in the situation in the first place. Letting go and moving on is an essential aspect of resilience and well being. The relief your student will feel after engaging in this exercise will free up energy to focus on the present and on the future, instead of the past.

# Week 9:

## Learning to Forgive

How did writing this letter affect you?  
Did the burden of carrying these experiences lift? Why?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

# Week 10:

## Committing to your Goals

Pursuing goals gives you a sense of meaning and purpose, and achieving your goals makes you happier in the long term. They improve your time and task management skills because you must get organized in pursuit of goals. Choose personally meaningful goals based on your own values and interests.

### Exercise:

If you are not sure what your lifelong goals are, try this exercise: imagine the personal legacy that could be written after you die. For what do you wish your children and grandchildren or community to remember you? Imagine and write a description of your life accomplishments. Elaborate on why these events and deeds are so meaningful and identify the values they reflect. Your goals will emerge from this exercise.

#### **Why is this Important to Students Now:**

The workload is intensifying as your students enter into the final stretch of the term and the only way to get through it all is to prioritize. Encouraging your students to keep in mind their long term goals will support the necessary attitudes and actions associated with their success. Goal directed activity requires passion and perseverance, so encourage them to choose goals that are consistent with their values and interests.

#### **Leading the Exercise:**

Students who feel overwhelmed by school obligations can benefit from this exercise of goal setting and taking these concrete actions to take control over their time. Managing their energy is as critical as managing their time. Engage in a discussion regarding time and task management and then suggest the goal setting exercise. Stick around to brainstorm solutions and action plans. Encourage your students to use a primer as a magnet and motivator. Primers are typically visual representations of winning, mastery, or achievements. Primers can also be sounds (music, bells, clapping) that are personally meaningful to the individual.

Watch animated film on Growth Mindset: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=75GFzikmRY0>



# Week 10:

## Committing to your Goals

What are your goals now that you imagined your personal legacy? What should be in your action plan to reach these goals?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

# Week 11:

## Physical Activity and Exercise

Physical activity and exercise increases quality of life, improves mood, reduces anxiety and stress, increases focus and attention, and improves quality of sleep. Moderate physical activity 3 times a week is a great place to start if you are not already active.

### Exercise:

If you're not sure that you have the time to exercise try this experiment: monitor your productivity, focus, quality of sleep, and mood for one week while you are exercising. Compare it to the following week when you are not exercising. Decide for yourself whether it is worth the time and effort.

#### **Why is this Important to Students Now:**

Stress management and mood management are necessary survival skills at this time of year. Students need to tap all the resources possible in order to do their best work, and have time for the pleasurable activities that keep them going. Allocating time for regular exercise may seem, on the surface, as something that they can't afford to do with so many assignments and projects due. The irony is that regular exercise will help our students to use their time more efficiently and will increase their concentration and energy so that they can get it all done with time to spare. As a side benefit, appetite and sleep will also improve.

#### **Leading the Exercise:**

Being a role model in this area is often a good way to encourage exercise in others. Talk about your own exercise program, or let your student know about these initiatives on campus:

- Mood Routes; Every Tuesday 12-1:30pm  
<https://connectru.ryerson.ca/organization/moodroutes/calendar/details/53376>  
Walking in community, on a regular basis, has many benefits. Suggest to your student that one hour a week of Mood Routes can lead to significant increases in productivity, creativity, and focus. Challenge your student to try it and see what happens.
- Wellness Wednesdays; Classes at the RAC  
<http://www.rec.ryersonrams.ca/ViewArticle.dbml?ATCLID=204919891>
- Or watch this health promotion video 23 ½ hours by Dr. Mike Evans <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aUalnS6HIGo> with your student and talk about what it can mean for their future. Ask if they think it may be worth their while to become more active, and if so, would it be best to go for a walk, take an exercise class, start biking to school, or some other activity?

# Week 11:

## Physical Activity and Exercise

What happened when you monitored your productivity, focus, and quality of sleep during the week? Did this information inspire you to keep your exercise routine?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

# Week 12:

## Meditation

Cultivating attention with regular practice can lead to increased happiness and well-being. Regular meditation impacts one's level of stress, cognitive functioning, and physical well-being. It tends to increase a sense of alertness, as well as relaxation. Jon Kabat Zinn teaches this lovingkindness meditation:

### Exercise:

Sit comfortably bringing length to your spine and keep a sense of softness in your posture. Rest your hands in your lap and tuck your chin in slightly. Close your eyes. Bring your awareness inward and focus on your breath. Pay attention to the inhale and the exhale. Bind your awareness to your breath. There's no need to change it -- just notice the rhythm and pace of your breath. Bring your awareness to the physical sensations in your body including places of pressure, contact, or temperature. PAUSE. When your breathing is deep and steady—say the following phrases to yourself:

May I be safe and protected, and free from inner and outer harm;  
May I be happy and contented;  
May I be healthy and whole, to whatever degree possible;  
May I experience ease of well-being;

After you have gone through this exercise focused on yourself, change your focus for each new category of people, for each round of the meditation:  
For example—directed towards someone who we love and who loves us unconditionally:

May you be safe and protected, and free from inner and outer harm;  
May you be happy and contented;  
May you be healthy and whole, to whatever degree possible;  
May you experience ease of well-being;

Thereafter, repeat the full meditation below for the following: (a) people who you know, (b) people who you don't know, (c) all beings on the planet (e) the planet (f) field of lovingkindness use this phrasing:

May we be safe and protected, and free from inner and outer harm;  
May we be happy and contented;  
May we be healthy and whole, to whatever degree possible;  
May we experience ease of well-being;

# Week 12:

## Meditation

How did it feel to go through this lovingkindness meditation? What did it bring up for you?

### **Why is this Important to Students Now:**

If the school term were a marathon this might be where your students hit the “wall”. Self-compassion is a critical aspect of resilience and focusing specifically on the Lovingkindness meditation can help students to cultivate a generosity of spirit towards oneself and others, just at a time when they are more likely to be impatient and judgmental. This particular meditation helps build a sense of community spirit and awareness of our common humanity.

### **Leading the Exercise:**

Invite your student to do this mindfulness meditation with you leading it. Provide the script and encourage your student to try it on their own. There are several websites with audio recordings of guided meditations:

- Guided Lovingkindness Meditation <http://www.positivityresonance.com/meditations.html>
- <http://www.freemindfulness.org/download>
- <http://youth.anxietybc.com/relaxation>
- Insight Meditation Timer <https://insighttimer.com/>
- <http://ryersonstudentaffairs.com/lovingkindness-meditation/>

Debrief with your student afterwards. Many people find meditation very challenging at first; their mind wanders onto other topics and they believe that they have “failed” at meditating. Normalizing the difficulties we all face can be very helpful. Explaining that the reason why we use the term “meditation practice” is because no one is perfect at it; we all must practice. Ask your student if they were able to get in touch with their self-compassion and a connection with other through the Lovingkindness Meditation, and what does it mean to them that they did?

---

---

---

---

---

---

# Week 13:

## Savouring Life's Joys (Past, Present, and Future)

Classes are over and exams are beginning—staying grounded can involve taking the time to remember the good times, be fully present (appreciating what is happening right now), and optimistically anticipating the times that make life worth living. Use all of your senses to recall a pleasant experience, to fully engage in the present joys, and to imagine a future event by considering all aspects of it.

### Exercise:

1. Pay close attention to the pleasures in your life; take the time to enjoy the taste and smells of your favourite foods, the beauty of a sunrise, the sound of your favorite music, and the joy of laughing with friends. It helps to block off one sense while focusing on others (e.g. close your eyes while listening to music).
2. Create a photo album of your favourite people and places. Look at it regularly to give yourself a boost, especially when away from home.
3. Seek out bittersweet experiences—the mix of sad and glad leads you to appreciate the moment even more, precisely because it will come to an end, and you know it.
4. Nostalgia is about remembering something that has passed but still brings you joy—spend some time thinking about your nostalgic moments.

#### **Why is this Important to Students Now:**

Classes are over and exams are beginning—staying grounded often involves paying attention to what is going right in our lives. Students may be getting caught up in the stress of performance on exams and final projects and forgot that they need to self care. One of the best ways to combat these types of stressors is to stop and appreciate the experiences that bring us joy, fulfillment and pleasure.

#### **Leading the Exercise:**

Savouring life's joys is so basic and yet something that seems to come last in a list of priorities in a busy productive life. Modeling this for your students can be very effective. Talk about your own recent experiences of savouring, or ask your students about a time when they stopped “running in circles” and took in something with their senses. If recently it has been too hectic to do so, suggest that this is a great time to start—as a counterbalance to the stress of finals. Think of it as the hot fudge on top of a ice cream cone; the contrast adds to the pleasure. These exercises help your students to activate their imagination and re-introduce pleasure and calm into their increasingly hectic lives.

Sources: Bryant & Veroff (2007); Kurtz, Wilson & Gilbert (2007); Liberman, Boehm, Lyubomirsky, & Ross (2009); Lyubomirsky (2007)

# Week 13:

## Savouring Life's Joys (Past, Present, and Future)

What happened to your stress level after spending a few moments indulging in joy and the memories that bring you closer to your family and friends?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

# ThriveRU Weekly Workbook Exercises:

## Sources

Many of the weekly exercises are based on research reported by Sonja Lyubomirsky as found in *The How of Happiness* (2007). Since she compiled the research of many others into her book, the original researchers who developed these exercises are cited here. Other significant original sources include Shawn Achor, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, Jon Kabat Zinn, Christine Padesky, Sharon Salzberg, and Martin Seligman.

### Sources for further reading:

Achor, S. (2010). *The happiness advantage: the seven principles of positive psychology that fuel success and performance at work*. New York: Broadway Books.

Bryant, F. B., & Veroff, J. (2007). *Savoring: a new model of positive experience*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Carlson, R. (1997). *Don't sweat the small stuff...and it's all small stuff: simple ways to keep the little things from taking over your life*. New York: Hyperion.

Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1991). *Flow: the psychology of optimal experience*. New York: HarperPerennial.

Dubé, M., Lapierre, S., Bouffard, L., & Alain, M. (2007). Impact of a personal goals management program on the subjective well-being of young retirees. *Revue Européenne de Psychologie Appliquée/European Review of Applied Psychology*, 57(3), 183-192. doi:10.1016/j.erap.2005.04.004

Dweck, C. S. (2006). *Mindset: the new psychology of success*. New York: Random House.

Kabat-Zinn, J. (2013). *Full catastrophe living: using the wisdom of your body and mind to face stress, pain, and illness*. New York: Bantam Books trade paperback.

Kurtz, J. L., Wilson, T. D., & Gilbert, D. T. (2007). Quantity versus uncertainty: When winning one prize is better than winning two. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 43, 979-985.

Lieberman, V., Boehm, J. K., Lyubomirsky, S., & Ross, L. D. (2009). Happiness and memory: Affective significance of endowment and contrast. *Emotion*, 9, 666-680.



Lyubomirsky, S. (2008). *The how of happiness: a new approach to getting the life you want*. New York, NY: Penguin Books.

Padesky, C. (n.d.). *Clinical Corner*. Retrieved January 24, 2017, from <http://www.padesky.com/clinical-corner>

Pasupathi, M., & Carstensen, L. L. (2003). Age and emotional experience during mutual reminiscing. *Psychology and Aging, 18*(3), 430-442. doi:10.1037/0882-7974.18.3.430

Pennebaker, J. W., & Seagal, J. D. (1999). Forming a story: The health benefits of narrative. *Journal of Clinical Psychology, 55*(10), 1243-1254. doi:10.1002/(sici)1097-4679(199910)55:10<1243::aid-jclp6>3.0.co;2-n

Salzberg, S. (2003). *Faith: trusting your own deepest experience*. New York: Riverhead Books.

Salzberg, S. (2014). *LovingKindess Meditation*. [Audio CD]. Louisville, CO: Sounds True, Inc.

Seligman, M.E. (2006). *Learned Optimism: How to Change Your Mind and Your Life*. Toronto: Vintage Books.

Seligman, M. E., Rashid, T., & Parks, A. C. (2006). Positive psychotherapy. *American Psychologist, 61*(8), 774-788. doi:10.1037/0003-066x.61.8.774

Seligman, M.E., Steen, T., Park, N., & Peterson, C. (2005). Positive psychology Progress: Empirical validation of interventions. *American Psychologist, 61*(5), 410-421.





